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MATWATCH

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STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS
By Steve Beverly

BUSINESS FAILURES: WHY?

The sale last week of Ron Fuller's USA Wrestling to David Woods and subsequent collapse of Billy Jack Haynes' Oregon Wrestling Federation came as no shock. Still, I've had calls asking why an alarming number of smaller promotions are dying when they appear to have several positives: (1) familiar regional talent; (2) at least semi-acceptable TV shows; and (3) experienced wrestling pros running the companies.

About 18 months ago, Gordon Solie told me: "Everybody in his brother who can rent a hall is trying to become a wrestling promoter. If they can get an hour or so of satellite TV time, they think they're on their way. But they soon find the road to wrestling riches is anything but paved with gold."

In Fuller's situation, I believe he miscalculated in two areas: first, you can't hang the hopes of new promotions around one city as Fuller tried in Knoxville; and second, while fresh faces such as Terry Gordy, Bill Dundee, Hector Guererro and Buddy Landel were imported, Fuller relied far too heavily on the Armstrongs, Wendall Cooley, Johnny Rich...names which expedited his death on the old Continental circuit. Plus, though Doug Furnas has improved, he's far too green to be the focal point of a promotion, hometown boy or not.

Fuller produced some excellent TV which I will miss. Gordon Solie did some of his most enthusiastic work in recent memory for USA. However, making The Mongolian Stomper (Archie Goldie) lead champion and feuding him predominantly with the aging Bullet (Bob Armstrong) made me wonder if Ron wasn't receiving counsel from Verne Gagne.

In Haynes' case, it's my gut instinct he didn't have enough business acumen to make the OWF work. For one thing, his television was on a weak UHF station and the production was second-rate. Second, Haynes appeared to rush his organization together before it was genuinely ready. My Northwest confidant, Glenn Fox, says the OWF's first show was a hot one, but one filled with too many delays and technical problems. The Hayneses actually apologized to the fans, which is terrible in any entertainment medium on opening night. Bad openers have doomed Broadway shows or television series. Plus, Oregon fans hungry for a better product than the traditional Don Owen effort had to come away disappointed.

The list mounts. Jim Crockett is keeping the storied history of the NWA together like a farmer in the midst of a drought and the return of Kevin Von Erich to the helm of World Class is not drawing cries of joy from insiders. Plus, I just saw the most recent Florida Championship TV shows and if that group makes it, I'll be convinced a fairy godmother does exist.

Why have these people deteriorated while David Woods and Eddie Gilbert flourish? Three reasons: One, Woods and Gilbert cleaned out the dead wood in the CWF but did it subtly so that it didn't disturb the viewer. Next, Eddie has gone with youth: Shane Douglas, the newest Lord Humongous, Bob Carter, Kokina, and the ubiquitous Paul E. Dangerously, none of whom have embarrassed this group. Plus, the career of Pez Whatley was revived beyond imagination and Willie B. Hert is perhaps the hottest black star in a sport sadly lacking in minorities---and in a region with a heavy black populous. Finally, the CWF's TV shows tell stories and give viewers a reason to care. Gilbert has been accused of overangling the shows and he's sensitive to that. But one CWF staffer told me, "Eddie listens to his people. If somebody makes a suggestion, he'll more often than not say, 'You're right...let's try it.' Eddie listens."

In our communications curriculum at Auburn, we have a course strictly on listening. Research indicates most businesses and their managers fail often because they don't listen. Maybe some wrestling bosses need to sit through this course. Then again, they probably wouldn't listen.

COMINGS & GOINGS

The Four Horsemen were all present and accounted for on TBS Saturday. In a week rife with rumors, we'd been told if a feud was abruptly not promoted and certain wrestlers missing on WCW, count them gone from the NWA. Sting, The Road Warriors, Ivan Koloff, and Steve Williams were missing, but all were mentioned...and it was only a 55-minute show. The CrockettWatch Rumors....

---CROCKETTWATCH RUMOR 1: Tully, Arn & Lex have all gone to Titan in a package. Nope, Vince's phone has been hot, but don't bet on this one.

---RUMOR II: Ric Flair will be Brother Love's surprise guest on the 8/29 Summer Slam show. Don't rule it out, but there's still more than a week before the show. The WWF says Curt Hennig will not be the surprise as originally thought.

---RUMOR III: Flair, Tully & Arn have issued a "he goes or we go" ultimatum to Crockett with he, of course, being Virgil Runnels. That's entirely possible, but it's happened before and been settled.

---Unless a deal was struck after press time, we can say the Turner people met with the Crocketts Sunday. The premise: Crockett is to negotiate settlements with his creditors. If the terms are acceptable, Ted will pay off the debts and the payoff will be deducted from the NWA purchase price. Biggest creditor: Bill Watts. Money owed: $2.5-3 million.

---Watts' ire at Jimmy is said to have intensified. The Cowboy flew to Dallas last week to meet with Crockett, who didn't show. It is reportedly the fourth unsuccessful attempt Watts has made at a telephone or personal contact with Crockett.

---One story has Crockett dumping Ivan Koloff, Russian Assassin, Paul Jones, and possibly Kendall Windham, among others. I've been told Crockett---if he still owns the company---will make some roster cuts before this weekend, but I'd be surprised the squad would be cut as low as 18 key wrestlers, as I was told last week.

---Those cuts would not be unusual right before a business transaction. It happens constantly in television station sales to keep a buying company from assuming too much debt. Crockett could attempt to liquidate certain contracts and Ted could renegotiate after a sale with the same wrestlers if they are still available.

---The deal with Jason the Terrible (Karl Moffatt) to come to the NWA fell through. He said no after they denied him the right to continue doing Japan. Maybe if Ted buys...

---MATWATCHER Dan Reilly raises this point: if Vince is doing so well, why does he even need Crockett's talent? Frankly, I don't think he seriously cares about anybody on JCP's lineup but Flair and Sting. And then, it's likely for defensive reasons. See, I think Flair would be signing his suicide note to go to the WWF because while I think Hogan-Flair would sell out the country, do you honestly think Vince would allow Ric to win? I'm not even sure he'd allow Flair to rise much above the Harley Race level.

---Plus, Vince has just imported so many new folks: Curt, Terry Taylor, The Rockers, Powers of Pain, Owen Hart (Blue Angel) and fans need time to adjust to the new faces before they're confused with a round of new imports.

---Iceman Parsons beat Kerry Von Erich for the Texas title in Dallas Friday night. Yeah, the Texas belt. Kerry subbed for Kevin and lost...but a lot of fans thought it was for Kerry's "world" belt.

---Joe Pedicino in Dallas last Friday taping two PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK efforts and doing color on World Class.

---Tommy Rich & Steve Prichard won a loser-leave-Georgia match over the Batten twins, so their next rivals for the Southern tag belts are the M.O.D. Squad.

---Owen Hart's big push will probably come in October. That's what the WWF tells him (probably an angle leading to his teaming with Bret). Isn't it strange that that's when Owen was scheduled to return to Japan? And Vince says he doesn't "control" people.

---Tentative lineup for CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS III on TBS Sept. 7 from Albany GA live: Sting vs. Barry Windham for the U.S. title; Mike Rotunda vs. Tim Horner for the NWA TV title; Dusty/Dick Murdoch vs. Ronnie Garvin/Al Perez; the official "turn" of Uncle Ivan (if he's still on the payroll). I'll save comment as I'm not convinced this is the final lineup.

---Jerry Oates promoted the Southeastern Bodybuilding Championship this past weekend in Columbus GA. Oates told the local paper he doesn't plan to wrestle any more in the U.S. but will hit Japan in three weeks.

---Marty Janetty's brother Phil told Columbus sportscaster Bruce (Big Bossman) Snyder that the Rockers really love the WWF. Phil says Marty blames a lot of the Rockers' past business problems on Shawn Michaels' mouth and indicates Marty had a heart-to-heart with Shawn before their jump to Vinceland, so things are under control.

---I love the Memphis promotion, but it needs to clean up its act in a key area: the recent presentation of a watermelon to Brickhouse Brown only amplifies the negative stereotypes this industry is often guilty of portraying. I know it's only a show, but....

---Finally, congrats to Donald Altman Jr., who wrestled as The Big A and The Rebel on some Georgia shows in the late '60s. Donnie is the new athletic director at Brantley County High School in South Georgia.

PROMOTER'S PROFILE: WWF

If you're over 35, you may remember two of Nikita Khrushchev's famous quotes:

"We will bury you."
"We will take you over without ever firing a shot."

These mottos may not hang on Vince McMahon's walls, but I think the latter particularly applies to the past year.

Most people who know me understand I espouse the theory of never being comfortable with McWrestling. At some point in time, I believe there is finite end to a success that blends with arrogance. Plus, as a historian, I am irritated by McMahon's five years of ignoring wrestling history. I don't care how he uses talent, just don't decry their pasts as if they were a black hole.

However, I have done a mental soft shoe for McMahon because of the virtual effortlessness with which he has increased his domination. And he has done so in a year with a colossal creative flop in Wrestlemania IV. Had that been a Broadway play, the critics would have killed it in one night. But wrestling is not quite the Great White Way. Jim Crockett may have pulled off a temporary Ernest Angley miracle the last Sunday in March but McMahon cried all the way to the cash register.

Vince openly tells industry insiders he doesn't worry about Crockett (well, maybe last Thanksgiving and Jan. 24) because he believes Crockett owns a self-destruct button: Dusty Rhodes. Chalk up another one for intuition.

Do you realize Vince's checkbook hardly squeezed for Curt Hennig, Terry Taylor, or the Rockers? Those guys needed money and didn't demand megaguarantees. A reliable source has told me Warlord & Barbarian joined the WWF for about $200,000 each, only about a third of what Vince would have had to fork over for the Road Warriors.

Konga has told Joe Pedicino he "would do anything for Vince McMahon." Why? He says, "They pick you up at the airport, they take you to the matches, and you get paid on time." That sentiment is typical of the young newcomers to Vinceland. Only veterans who are close to natural burnout are doing much bellyaching.

Do I think Vince will ever be the only game in town? No. And I think it would be not only the worst thing for the fans, or for the industry. It would be the worst thing for Vince to have the party all to himself.

If Vince doesn't have some challenger, there's no one below him on the pecking order to blow off as minor league and eventually, creative inertia sets in (though I believe it already has).

We're in a meltdown stage of wrestling as I wrote two weeks ago. Even the WWF is losing a few scattered TV markets (MATWATCHer Victor Martinez reports SUPERSTARS has just been dumped in Lubbock TX) and somehow, even with the new faces, the WWF extravaganza is beginning to have the sameness look to it as TV variety shows in the seventies.

Next Monday night, one of the big questions for McMahon will be answered: does a four-month layoff for Hulk Hogan mean a "need" has been created for fans to rediscover him....or is the old cliche "outta sight, outta mind" precluding a slow recession in the pull of Vince's monster personality. I'm curious and I'll bet you are, too.

I REMEMBER...Ox Baker vs. Ray Candy

When Ann Gunkel's All-South Association broke from the NWA in 1972, some of wrestling's storied veterans combined with rookies Ann discovered in Georgia to form an impressive independent roster.

The young Ray Candy was never more than a mediocre brawler but he had a big pull with young blacks in the Savannah area where he was raised. By the summer of '73, Candy had won the All-South Georgia belt and on a hot August evening, offered the title against the stoic Ox Baker in that famous town of Waycross GA.

I was ring announcer for that match and I'll never forget the evening. The match was probably one of the worst in modern history, consisting mostly of Ray's nervous headshakes after a blow from Ox and Ox's slow careening flat of his back after a Candy fist.

Ray won the match in 2-out-of-3 falls but the classic memory is of Kirk Freeman, who was known as the Eddie Haskell of South Georgia. Kirk plopped into a ringside seat next to MATWATCHer Max Lide. Kirk's kick was to rush to ringside about every two minutes and point his eyebrows upward in the same fashion as Ox's distinct countenance.

Unintentionally, Kirk was doing more to work the crowd than Ox or Ray. By about the 47th browpoint, the fans were in stitches. But in between the second and third falls, the memory is like yesterday.

Ox slowly emerged from the ring and towered over Kirk at ringside. The City Auditorium silenced as the crowd was sure Baker was going to heartpunch Kirk. Instead, Ox simply grabbed my mike, pointed at Kirk, grinned, and yelled, "Boy, you've sure got some nuts in this town."

Since most of you don't know Kirk Freeman, you can't appreciate it fully (he once threatened promoter Aaron Newman with a double-barrel shotgun), but take my word, Ox Baker received the closest thing to a standing ovation in his multifaceted career that August night in Georgia.

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TV TEMPO (Weekend of Aug. 12-14)

RATINGS: PINFALL! - Must See. PILEDRIVER - Excellent. POWERSLAM - Good. DRAW - Average. RESTHOLD - Fair. BOMB - Poor. A PLUS is for midscale rating.

(MWC) - Mark & Chris Youngblood d. Afa & Sika; Bad Boy Brown d. Little Mr. T; Tony Atlas drew with Dory Funk Jr. POWERSLAM-PLUS.

(MEMPHIS) - Jeff Jarrett d. Keith Eric; Billy Travis/Scott Steiner/Shawn Baxter d. Gary Young/Brickhouse Brown/Senshe; Phil Hickerson d. Tommy King; Cat Garrett d. Blue Knight; Robert Fuller d. Alan Raper. ANGLES: Brown angered when gifted with a watermelon during Stud Stable party; Steiner offers $5,000 for shot at CWA title. RESTHOLD.

(AWA) - Key match: Curt Hennig-Jerry Lawler AWA title rematch. Hennig wins on DQ at 22:00 when Curt kicked over top rope. POWERSLAM...for title bout.

(USA) - Nelson Royal d. Brad Anderson; Johnny & Davey Rich d. RPMs; The Stomper d. Todd Morton who juices heavily and is saved by Ron Fuller. Fuller "breaks the leg" of Ron Wright's bodyguard. ANGLE: Bullet spanks Gumby but Bill Dundee paints yellow streak on Bullet's back. POWERSLAM.

(NWA) - TBS: Varsity Club/Kevin Sullivan d. Gary Phelps/Rick Allen/Don Valentine; Ricky Morton, Al Perez, Brad Armstrong, Barry Windham, Fantastics win other squashes. BOMB. NWA PRO: Tully & Arn, Sting, Sullivan, Lex Luger, Perez, Ronnie Garvin, Nikita Koloff all win squashes. BOMB. WORLD WIDE: Steve Williams-Mike Rotunda draw in NWA TV title match; Garvin/Perez/Sullivan d. Armstrong/Horner/Joe Cruze; Midnight Express, Nikita, Road Warriors win squahses. POWERSLAM. MAIN EVENT: Larry Zbyszko d. Kendall Windham; Armstrong/Horner/Bugsy McGraw d. Tiger Conway/Chris Champion/Cruel Connection; Williams-Rotunda World Wide match. DRAW.

(W. CLASS) - Shaun Simpson d. Jack Victory in reverse decision; Eric Embry/J.J. Funk d. Steve Casey/Matt Borne; Steve Cox d. Killer Brooks; Michael Hayes wins DQ over Samu; Kerry-Kimala ends in double COR.

(PWTW) - CWF, Gilbert/Dangerously attack Sam Love; WCCW, Embry d. Casey; FLAIR, Becky Clampett DQ over Devila; WWF, Ted DiBiase d. Mike Richards; SCW, M.E.B. d. Chuck Allen; WWC, Hurricane Castillo/Miguel Perez Jr. d. Super Black Ninja/El Profe; 7UP WRESTLER OF WEEK: Jesse Ventura.

(SCW) - Joey Maggs d. Bill Smith; M.E.B. d. Barry Turner and Gerald Finley in separate matches; Ranger Ross d. Doug Sommers; Chris Adams d. Jim Bryant; Tommy Rich/Steve Prichard d. Joel Deaton/Rama Brown in awful match; Mr. Wrestling II d. Buck Robley. BOMB...taped before 75 fans at outdoor ballpark.

(WWF) - SUPERSTARS: Rick Rude d. Buck Zumhofe; Randy Savage, British Bulldogs, Bad News Brown, Jim Duggan, Dino Bravo, Powers of Pain win other squashes. RESTHOLD. CHALLENGE: Terry Taylor d. Scott Casey; Bolsheviks, Tito Santana, Greg Valentine, Big Bossman win other squashes; Brother Love interviews Jimmy Hart & Hart Foundation.

(CWF) - Samoans d. Lee Peek/Mike Starr; Rick Hazzard-Mark Pyle no contest when Samoans attack Pyle before D.I./Detroit Demolition begin brawl with Samoans; Tom Prichard d. Bucky Siegler; Austin Idol d. Turbo Ted; Jerry Stubbs d. Nightmare Freddy but Ken Wayne runs in and Stubbs juices from Freddy's claw. Danny Davis is also clawed before save by Hazzard & Prichard. ANGLES: Samoans hold Missy Hyatt for Alan Martin to kiss; Gilbert/Dangerously piledrive Burrhead Jones before Idol, Willie B. Hert save. DRAW-PLUS...the Missy angle not that strong on TV.

LINES OF THE WEEK - 1. Burrhead Jones, CWF, on Dangerously: "I'm gonna get that constipated rabbit and when I whip him, he ain't gonna be constipated no more." 2. Dangerously, CWF: "You wouldn't know anything about constipation because Eddie knocked the you-know-what outta you." 3. Gorilla Monsoon/Bobby Heenan, WWF, on Terry Taylor: GORILLA..."The mecca of manhoods? What does that mean? HEENAN..."It means of all the manhoods, he's the mecca." 4. Jim Cornette, TBS: "Gary Hart's so ugly, he makes Grandpa Munster look like a Playgirl centerfold." 5. Hennig, AWA: "Maybe I'll be suspended, maybe I won't."

STRONGEST COMMENT - Jim Ross, TBS: "The manager is the first to go when things go wrong. Ask Chuck Tanner (ex-Atlanta Braves manager)." Take note, Ted.

BOO AWARD - Verne Gagne, AWA, for suggesting Rocky Mt. Thunder would have "put Curt Hennig out" if Curt weren't "suspended."

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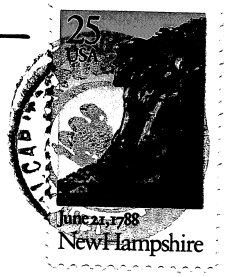

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